A GRAMMAR OF WUTUN

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Erika Sandman. 2016. *A Grammar of Wutun*. Helsinki: University of Helsinki. Doctoral dissertation, xii, 370 p. [2] [http://bit.ly/2C0jMCY, accessed 13 December 2017]

An occasional problem when doing research on the languages of northern China is that while there are medium-sized structuralist, historical, and contemporary grammars for many local non-Sinitic varieties (e.g., Todaeva 1966, Chen and Cinggeltei 1986, and Fried 2010 for Bonan), the same does not seem to be equally true for their Sinitic contact varieties. *A Grammar of Wutun*, a dissertation written by Erika Sandman at the two departments of World Culture and Modern Languages at the University of Helsinki, helps close this gap for what has since Chen (1981) been known as one of the most idiosyncratic varieties of North-Western Mandarin. This language formed as part of the Amdo Sprachbund in intensive contact with Amdo Tibetan and, to some extent, Qinghai Bonan.

 A Grammar of Wutun is based on Basic Linguistic Theory (Dixon 1997, 2010) and tends to make use of well-established classics for individual linguistic domains (e.g., Lamprecht 1994 for information structure, Yap et al. 2011 for nominalization). Based on a corpus of approximately 1,300 naturally attested and 1,100 elicited clauses mostly collected by the author herself, it first describes the sociolinguistic and research context (1-18), the phonology (19-41, following Janhunen et al. 2008) and word classes (42-175, nouns, verbs, minor) of Wutun. After attested morphological forms are thus accounted for, it continues by describing functional domains such as aspect (176-205); evidentiality and egophoricity (206-239); clausal word order, valency, and information structure (240-286); clause-

type-related morphological mechanisms for interrogating, ordering, and negating (287-310); and clause connection (311-348). The book closes with glossed and translated transcriptions of three short procedural monologues (349-361).

In the nominal domain, Wutun exhibits an interesting distinction in the plural domain. The suffix *-jhege* can indicate either numbers of approximately 3 to 4 or generic groups (e.g., *lhoma-jhege* 'a few students' / 'students (in general)' when following regular nouns, but it refers to non-collective groups with personal pronouns (*ngu-jhege* 'each of us individually'). It contrasts with *-dera ~ -duru* used for delimited groups with regular nouns (*ren-dera* 'the people (e.g., of this country)'), and with *-mu*, denoting collectives when attached to pronouns (*nga-mu* 'we (as a group)'; 48-50, 71-72). Wutun has also developed a case system with a zero nominative and five marked cases. Particularly notable among these are the sociative in *-liangge* which grammaticalized from 'two' (cf. SM *liǎng ge* 'two') (56-61) and the "optional dative" in *-ha* that is used to mark several types of non-actors and functions as a form of differential case marking conditioned by information structure (277-286).

The evidential system is approximately what one would expect for most Tibetic varieties, with the standard division between egophoric, sensory/inferential and factual, and a distinct system for quotative/hearsay. This cannot, however, be said of the relatively complex aspectual system. Sandman analyses it as consisting of two sets of markers, namely primary aspect markers that indicate temporally bounded situations and secondary aspect markers that indicate materially bounded situations (cf. Lindstedt e.g. 2001). The primary aspect markers are perfective *-lio*, progressive-habitual *-di*, patient-oriented resultative *-ma* and "prospective" *-zhe* (which for most ends and purposes seems to act as a form of non-obligatory future marker rather than a prospective in the strict sense of the word, which would indicate a future development as determined by a previous state of affairs). The secondary aspect markers are incompletive *-la*, completive *-gu* and agent-oriented resultative *-she*. These aspect markers can combine into chains of up to three markers, of which the first is always secondary and the last always primary (though secondary aspect markers can occasionally be used on their

own). Among primary aspect markers, the combinations progressive-perfective and perfective-prospective are attested, while among secondary aspect markers, there are the combinations incompletive-completive, agent-oriented resultative-completive and incompletive-agent-oriented resultative. The type of interaction that ensues is nicely illustrated by (1):

(1) *ngu*   *gu-ha* *dadada*   *jja-**la**-**gu**-**lio***
    1SG   3SG-OD just   meet-INCOMPL-COMPL-PFV
    'I just visited him/her (the visit lasted for some time, was completed a moment ago and is over now).' (Xiawu Dongzhou) [192]

A problem of this description is that it heavily focuses on overt suffixes and their combinatorics, but only pays limited attention to zero stems (which are attested and used in multiple functions, including future) and the way in which verbal aktionsart might influence the choice of secondary (and, somewhat less crucially for the overall analysis, primary) aspect markers. For instance, Sandman compares (2) and (3), arguing that the form in (2) "denotes terminated, temporary states that do not involve change across time," while the form in (3) "denotes terminated processes that do involve change across time." This is not obvious at all from the glossing of *ddo* as 'think' and *tin* as 'be sick', though *tin* is indeed glossed as 'hurt' and 'get ill' elsewhere (83, 218), suggesting an inceptive aktionsart. Occasional reference to what informants considered impossible might have clarified a lot in this section, but since Sandman relied on no more than three informants throughout, her very sparing use of negative evidence is fully justified.

(2) *ngu*   *ni*   *lai*   *be-ji-li*   *ddo-**la**-**lio***
    1SG   2SG   come   NEG-reach-SEN.INF   think-INCOMPL-PFV
    'I thought you will not come in time.' (Xiawu Dongzhou) [191]

(3) *nga*   *tin-**di**-**lio***
    1SG.OBL   be sick-PROGR-PFV
    'I was suffering from illness.' (Xiawu Dongzhou) [194]

Sandman (178) notes that "multiple aspect marking systems that resemble the Wutun system seem to be crosslinguistically quite uncommon," though at least for Central Asia and the Amdo region there is an alternative explanation, namely that most descriptions of aspect systems are less extensive than hers. While detailed elicitation on aspect (see e.g., Tatevosov 2002 with a focus on aktionsart or Molochieva 2010 and of course Sandman's own work with a focus on combinatorics) is possible, most regional grammars simply lack sufficient detail on this domain. And while e.g., Santa might indeed exhibit a rather simple aspectual system (cf. Field 1997:188-217), a detailed description of aspect in Eastern Yugur could plausibly reveal a system that is only slightly less complex than Wutun (cf. Nugteren 2003:278-282, Brosig and Skribnik forthcoming:904).

The chapters on clause structure and clause connection mostly detail the expected picture of Turko-Mongolic word order and postpositions, but there is also some dedicated discussion on several morphemes mainly related to information structure. The chapter on interrogation, negation and imperatives, in turn, relates to both clause types and verbal categories. The structural taxonomy of question types in which A-not-A-type questions as a subtype of polar questions is distinguished from alternative questions is very convincing, and the correlation between factual evidentiality and rhetorical questions is quite notable. The negation system is close to Standard Mandarin, though it has started making a distinction between negative copulas and prefixes. The imperative system is described in extreme brevity, but exhibits a number of interesting features, including first person [plural] imperative based on *lai* 'come', third person imperatives from causatives [plus zero] and a marked "familiar" second person imperative which is LESS polite than zero.

Next to describing the language, Sandman also draws comparison to other varieties. She consistently cites forms from standard Mandarin, and occasionally draws comparisons to North-Western Mandarin and its varieties, to Bonan and other Southern Mongolic languages, to Amdo Tibetan, and to Turkic Salar.

Overall, *A Grammar of Wutun*, in this form or another, is bound to become an indispensable resource for all researchers into the languages of the Amdo Sprachbund and a reliable source for any

typologist. Due to its easily accessible style, it might also function as a reference work for native speakers, though English may constitute a significant barrier. It is very much hoped, however, that Sandman will continue her excellent research work on Wutun, especially by widening the material and documentary basis that translate into an even more fine-grained description of usage patterns and functions.

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